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## rhizomes.19 summer 2009

### **Rhizome Yourself: Experiencing Deleuze and Guattari from Theory to Practice** **Rachel Douglas-Jones and Salla Sariola**

#### **Abstract**

The leitmotif of this paper is the act of bridging gaps between the conceptual, methodological and experiential. Foremost it is an attempt to fuse aspects of the abstract philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari with anthropological understandings of Global Assemblages (Ong and Collier 2005) through incorporation of theory into everyday life.

Here, we describe our journey exploring Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual Rhizome. It was an experiment, undertaken in order to bring new ideas to bear on our current and future ethnographic research relating to bioethics, clinical trials and the complexities of international science collaborations in Sri Lanka. In working to bridge a perceived gap between Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy and our familiar anthropological canon, we made real the abstract rhizomatic thinking they describe, through interaction with a physical rhizome, or plant root.

In this paper we introduce BLAD, the Double Articulated Lobster Body (BLAD, acronym, in reverse) which acts as the focus of the narrative of the journey: how BLAD came to live in our house in a vase, how BLAD got 'its' name, how BLAD is a rhizome, a lobster and a deity, and how we subsequently replanted it. We suggest that just as a root of the rhizomic plant needs to be close to the surface to flower, so does rhizomatic thinking need to be present in daily life to affect thought. It is a tool most effective when personally incorporated. The story we tell in this paper is just one way in which the gap between the physical rhizomatic root and the conceptual tool has been bridged. The method described is as much creative as it is destructive. In order to 'live' the theory as commanded, the tool has been woven into thought as far more than a metaphor. For this to occur, a physical root has served as the means for breaking prior (arborescent) templates of thought, clearing the path for the thinking of new thoughts, extension of ideas and hopefully a fuller understanding of the productive relations between Deleuze-Guattarian Rhizomes and anthropological analysis.

#### **Introduction**

[1] We are challenged, by *A Thousand Plateaus* (2004 [1987]), to incorporate philosophy in to our lives and by doing so, think new thoughts, have new experiences and create new concepts. It is to this challenge we responded. In this paper, we [\[1\]](#) present an ethnography of an attempt to understand the concept of the rhizome in Deleuze and Guattari. We took a Deleuze-Guattarian step towards an unconventional way of thinking that was at times surreal and performative, and through the understanding gained, we now come to suggest a potential for a rhizomatic ethnography as an anthropological methodology.

[2] This is not a conventional paper but a description of an (ongoing) journey, inspired initially by the text as an 'open system', from which elements of philosophy are woven into the 'melody' of everyday life. We could have sat in libraries, maybe started a reading group or held a workshop. Instead, we created the concept of 'BLAD' and went on a journey to live Deleuze-Guattarian thought, to access the concept of rhizome, itself an open system, through experience. With this motivation, we cast the rhizome as a site of defiance to the arborescence we suspected in our thoughts. Our challenge was to think more originally, through thinking more organically.

[3] The impetus for this encounter with *A Thousand Plateaus* came from our common work on International Science Collaborations and Bioethics in South Asia, and the complexities of the field data we are confronted with when studying a subject that is conceptually and methodologically global. As anthropologists, we are attentive to the scales on which different phenomena present themselves, and through observation of the fabric of the

everyday alongside what would traditionally be considered 'global' phenomena, we are faced by a need to find alternative ways to analytically respond to the changes brought about by globalization. We turned towards the concept of rhizome as a new way of 'thinking' these connections. Anthropologists would recognise the skills necessary in the process: acute observational skills, the intermingling of experience with theory and practice, a 'fieldwork' of an experience, which folds in on itself through the researcher-subject coming to new realizations, often in an incremental, difficult to detect manner. 'Fieldnotes' of a kind were kept by each of us, and it is through reflection on these, and the processes by and through which this experiment came about, that this paper could be written. We made ourselves the test pieces of this abstraction, to see if we could actually develop the Deleuze-Guattarian rhizome in our anthropology.

[4] As far as we are aware, this is not a common practice. The teaching and learning of generic social science research methods in the UK is predominantly theoretical, equipping researchers to perform tasks, understand the epistemological and ontological issues in their research and develop the skills necessary to proceed to obtaining 'data'. Perhaps writing of this kind would have been more familiar during the 'reflexive turn' of the 1980s, during which the experiences of the ethnographer became (perhaps overly) central to the narration of research. Our work draws on elements of the reflexive turn, albeit implicitly. We use and see ourselves as objects, but our aim is larger—out of the experience we seek options for method applicable to the challenges outlined above—skills, ways of thinking, theoretical approaches, perhaps even an orientation, instrumental in making messy fieldwork fragments cohere without simplifying them nor making them artificially neat.

[5] The leitmotif of this paper is the act of bridging gaps between the conceptual, methodological and experimental, a counter to the interconnectivity and movement inherent in the conceptual rhizome. However, the gaps we identify move, and we acknowledge that they are fixed only in our own casting of the bodies of theory we work with, and our own ethnographic observations.

### Structure of paper

[6] This paper is an auto-ethnography of a process of learning to understand Deleuze and Guattari. We have chosen to write it in a way that combines a snapshot of the theory which we were drawing on at the time of the experiment, and an ethnographic account of the experiment itself. There are many ways in which this paper could have been written, or performed, and this relation to knowledge described in a rhizomatic fashion, but presenting it the way we do, we are recognizing the academy's need to communicate ideas in writing, in a linear format. Even if methodologically and theoretically we become more rhizomatic, the imparting of knowledge currently requires some arborescence. While exploring rhizomatic thinking, this paper is structured as follows:

[7] First, we offer a brief overview of the anthropological project that we work on and the literature upon which our interest in global phenomena has stood. Though we seek to depart from it, we nonetheless acknowledge the trajectory of thought which has brought anthropological investigation to the themes that it now addresses. The rhizome is then analysed ethnographically and theoretically, and there are at least three rhizomes in this paper. Firstly, we describe how, seizing upon the rhizome as a possible thought-aid, we were caught up in a story involving our very own rhizome. The paper introduces BLAD, the Double Articulated Lobster Body (BLAD, an acronym in reverse) which is the focus of our journey's narrative. Secondly, taking from these experiences, we proceed to reflect on the ways in which our encounter with BLAD has helped us think *with* Deleuze and Guattari, and a discussion of the rhizome as a concept follows. Finally we discuss how the rhizome has informed our understanding of the potential uses of the concept in our own field.

[8] The project that we work for is a collaborative research project between universities of Cambridge, Sussex and Durham, called International Science and Bioethics Collaboration with ten anthropologists working on science and technology research in Asia. Broadly, it aims to follow from the perspective of anthropology the recent shifts of scientific and biomedical developments: what happens as novel biomedical and scientific research is taken to Asian contexts. Countries and areas under investigation include genetics, new reproductive technologies, clinical trials and bioethics networks in countries such as China, Korea, Thailand, India and Sri Lanka. This is challenging work. Collectively, we investigate phenomena larger and more complex than any one researcher could undertake alone.

The threads that we will weave together cover a region, and will point to as many revealing discontinuities as they will parallels. Indeed, the very art of comparison is itself opened for analytical work through our endeavor.

[9] The sub-project concerning the authors of this paper focuses on the building of ethical capacity and the operation of clinical trials in Sri Lanka. Analyzing these subjects is conceptually and methodologically complicated. Off-shoots ricochet in all directions; classification seems impossible; the task of selecting and following global interactions, terms and relations between people is massive. How to think this?

[10] Literature on the intersections of globalization, Deleuze and Guattari, and ethnography are few, but some attempts to understand these connections have been made. The existing literature has discussed/challenged the following themes: global-local (Kearney 1995; Appadurai 1996); the role of the anthropologist in constructing them (Malkki 1992; Gille and Ó Riain 2002); Diaspora, 'beyond' culture and transnationalism (Verdery 1998, Gupta and Ferguson 1997); ethnographies of global flows of various ideas and practices such as finances, policies and objects/actants (Ong and Collier 2005); multi-sitedness in ethnography (Burawoy et al. 2000; Coleman and Collins 2006; Gille and Ó Riain 2002; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Gusterson 1997; Marcus 1997), etc. In addition, the last few years have seen the emergence of calls from within the discipline for an 'intensification' of the dialogue between Deleuze and anthropology (De Castro 2007), pointing to existing theoretical parallels. Though some authors have elegantly addressed the movements of practices, ideas, people and their connections (Malkki 1992; Law 2004 [2008]; Ong and Collier 2005; Strathern 1991), we found few who provided a thorough ethnographic-conceptual-framework for studying these multi-sited phenomena. Prompted by a disjuncture between our own observations and existing theories of globalization, which do not quite capture the ways in which we understand and see certain associations unfolding in the field, and finding previous analytical and methodological options insufficient and predominantly arborescent in their consistent linearity, we sought a new path with *A Thousand Plateaus*.

### **Ethnography: A walk down the garden path and into the forest**

*This is how it should be done: lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times.*  
—Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 2004 [1987] p. 161

[11] In working to bridge a perceived gap between Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy and our familiar anthropological canon, we made real the abstract rhizomatic thinking that Deleuze and Guattari describe through interaction with a physical rhizome, or plant root. In this section of the paper, 'the ethnography', we describe the 'experimentation with opportunities' and 'possible lines of flight' that this experience has inspired.

[12] The tale has quite innocent origins on a Saturday afternoon on a rainy north-eastern English day, while discussing *A Thousand Plateaus* over tea. What *was* this rhizome thing that Deleuze and Guattari were on about? Was that not like the philosophical term for the anthropological concept of global assemblage that we work working with, but are not entirely content with? Even from the outset, we were aware of the parallels with our own work, but wanted to better understand their potential. We were staring out of the window into the garden. '*Grass is/has a rhizome, or ginger. Everything is connected.*' Salla searched for botanical points of reference. '*We have rhizomes in the garden,*' Bob suddenly shouted, and jumped up to set off down the garden path. He returned, muddy root in hand. It was an iris.

[13] We took the rhizome home, washed it to keep in the house for a few days. Perhaps the root would help us think about *A Thousand Plateaus*, we thought. Once deposited in a transparent vase, the physical rhizomic root was placed in the centre of our dining table, to remind us of the conceptual rhizomes in our work. It was out of the ground, in our lives, and living, growing, in our lounge.

[14] It had a certain swamp monster or crustacean like presence, and was a rather strange thing to sit with over breakfast, not being a typically aesthetic table centrepiece. But there it stayed. The feeling was that just as in the

garden the rhizomic plant needs to be planted close to the surface to flower (Shear 1999: 43) so does rhizomatic thinking need to be present in daily life to affect thought. A constant reminder of how to think differently. The rhizome entered our daily conversations, and even appeared at night, Rachel dreaming multi-coloured rhizomes, honky-tonk circus music playing in the background.

[15] As we became accustomed to having the swamp-crustacean in a vase on our dinner table, we soon decided it needed to be named. In the post-prandial glow of a dinner party, fuelled by the text of *A Thousand Plateaus* and a certain amount of chocolate mousse, the observation was made that the root itself looked rather like a lobster. This was a reference to the opening page to chapter three in *A Thousand Plateaus* with a picture of a lobster and the title: 'Double Articulation', and a sentence on the following page saying: '*God is a lobster.*' (2004 [1987]: 44-45). Playing around with words, and ideas, we thought about the ways in which doubles are productive—the double of the 'book' rhizome in plant form, which looked like a lobster, was leading us to new understandings of the text. The phrase 'double articulated lobster body' emerged, and a quick-witted dinner companion rapidly reversed the leading letters of dalb to blad. So, BLAD got its name, and it was decided that as god was a lobster, BLAD would represent a deity and thus be genderless, ubiquitous, and defying all definition. Nevertheless we often found ourselves forced to self-correct the normative male-ing of BLAD.

[16] Describing how connections and 'rhizomatic' thought appeared in the everyday is a difficult task. The challenge of those weeks was not just to pay attention to the way in which the plant arose in conversation and in our academic and personal lives. It was to observe how, as we made these unusual connections: plant in vase, iris in random garden—lobster on sale in the market, internet image of human face morphing into lobster—rhizome in relation to machinic assemblage and so on; we were learning a different *form* of thought. It was not something one could prescribe, and is not easily described. Nonetheless, it was more than a freedom from a previously imagined 'arborescence', it was inventive, exciting, unpredictable and put each of us in relation to the plant and Deleuze and Guattari's writing in unexpected ways.

### ***Make rhizomes, not roots, never plant!***[\[2\]](#)

[17] The days passed, and though it had become clear that BLAD was the center of attention in our household, it was time to return the rhizome to the soil. To re-bury the root. However, given the many thoughts inspired, this reburial did not seem like a death of BLAD; BLAD was ubiquitous, after all. So, in recognition that BLAD would be able to grow once back in the soil, we decided to call the re-planting of BLAD a rebirth. A burial of a root, a (re-) birth of a rhizome and thus a bu-ri-birth.

[18] Invitations were sent out, taking an image from an anthropological textbook, which humorously inverted the human/lobster relationship. A quiche soaked in multi-colour dyes was cooked, and, just to be different, we baked a beetroot cake. BLAD was taken out along the river at dusk, and bu-ri-birthed at a junction of a forest, field and river.

### ***'Don't sow, grow offshoots!'***

[19] While the physical presence of BLAD was no more in our living room, there was a lingering presence of BLAD in our lives and the growing story/cult amongst our acquaintances. We decided a virtual presence of BLAD would not be bad thing. So BLAD got a Facebook account, and even a blog.

[20] The Facebook account is as much for our own fun as it is for the geeky interest of others. You, our readers, are all welcomed to request BLAD's friendship, [Blad Rhizome] if you want to be reminded of rhizomatic thought through your minifeed! The account also shared the photos of the evening of the bu-ri-birth.

[21] The blog, on the other hand, is more for a catalogue of our own developments of thought, written in BLAD first person. These are difficult to articulate, and apart from the abstract, little text has so far appeared on the blog. It has been a repository of many lobster-related thoughts, given the strange frequency with which lobsters are now cropping up in our lives, reminding us of rhizomatic thinking.

### ***Write with slogans!***

[22] Along with the blog, this virtual rhizome grew more offshoots. Again taking the command from Deleuze and Guattari 'write with slogans!' (2004 [1987]: 27), we started signing off our notes to one another with 'Free The Rhizome', or FTR. Mostly driven by a desire to share the potentially thought-changing power of the rhizome in what we increasingly saw as an arborescent world, Free The Rhizome has been, and remains, about making an idea travel, encouraging people to think the rhizome, or through the rhizome, for themselves in their own lives. The Free the Rhizome message has made it from walls in Durham to the cities of London, Helsinki, Berlin, Bognor Regis, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester, Bradford, Paris, Cardiff, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Pontevedra and Vigo, San Francisco, Auckland, Inverness, Aberdeen, Colombo, Galle, Chandigarh, Delhi and Chennai. The equipment of this campaign is a marker pen. If you see FTR graffiti scrawled on a toilet cubicle or train layby, think of the rhizome.

### **Experiential, theoretical rhizomes—from physical root to methodological/conceptual tool**

[23] So what of this bizarre ethnographic tale? Is it possible draw together this thought experiment with the work on global bioethics and biomedicine in Asia that we described at the outset? In this section of analysis we further explore the gaps and bridges that have been made across these two domains through discussions of the guises that rhizomes take in this paper.

[24] In the course of this story, BLAD became a thought experiment that unfolded on several levels. We will first briefly describe the concept of rhizome and then discuss the impacts that thinking with the rhizome has had, and may continue to have, on practical and theoretical approaches to our work. By looking at the relationship that evolved in our work and lives between the rhizome as root, BLAD, and the conceptual tool as outlined by Deleuze and Guattari, we consider how they have informed and fed into one another over the course of this experience. We discuss the relationship between this 'enlivened' concept and methodological approaches in our anthropological research project. With reflections on the kinds of techniques already in use for gathering data from ever changing fields, we suggest that the rhizome can be usefully employed methodologically, thus enhancing theory/method links, to form an analytical framework in order to understand the complexities of globalization. Following this we move on to what our tendency to think anthropologically, reflexively, has made us aware of in this process. What contributions can we make to discussions of the multiple ways a rhizome can be understood and thought with?

### **Rhizome as a Concept**

[25] The rhizome as a concept introduced by Deleuze and Guattari is fairly well-defined. Ian Buchanan (2007) extracts from the introduction of *A Thousand Plateaus* titled 'Rhizome' six key principles to which something, in order to be considered rhizomatic, ought to resemble. Briefly, these cover firstly the connectivity of any point to any other point; secondly its composition of dimensions, meaning it is neither one nor multiple; thirdly its operation through variation, expansion, conquest, capture and offshoots (rather than reproduction); fourthly that it pertains to an infinitely modifiable map with multiple entrances and exits that must be produced; fifthly that it is acentered, non-signifying and acephalous, and finally, that it is not amenable to any structural or generative model (Buchanan 2007).

[26] While these criteria are very useful for assessing whether something can be considered rhizomatic (as Buchanan proceeds to do for the Internet), Colombat (1991) claims that as a concept, '*it [the rhizome] really makes sense only when applied to a variety of experimental fields—philosophy, arts, the sciences, or even everyday life*' (1991: 15). For us, it has made many different kinds of sense, depending on where it is applied, where it is made present. The rhizome of our experiment, BLAD, through its presence in our home and social lives, fed into the way in which we viewed our field and sought to approach our fieldwork. For these reasons it is important for us to be clear in our own usage of the term.

[27] Let us remember that living theories is a Deleuze-Guattarian imperative. It was in this spirit that we took the rhizome from theory back to its biological 'roots' in the form of BLAD, connecting ethnography with a philosophical concept. Abstraction from everyday life experiences is what anthropology 'does', and as anthropologists, it made



sense for us to try and reach understanding through lived experience, a methodology that is inherent in ethnography.

[28] The relationship between BLAD and the Deleuze-Guattarian rhizome has two faces. In one, we are *not* attempting to confuse, conflate or conjoin the biological rhizome with the conceptual through this experiment. In another, the experiment itself prompts the breakdown between biological rhizome and the Deleuze-Guattarian conceptual rhizome—the separated pair becoming re-intertwined through our work. So, while recognizing the care many authors have taken to distinguish the concept as used by Deleuze and Guattari, the thought experiment, by taking the biological rhizome as inspiration, forces the concept of rhizome to behave in a rhizomatic manner. It connects the unconnected, becomes a 'strange attractor', outcome of a deliberately nonlinear system, where phenomena converge. Following Deleuze and Guattari's treatment of concepts, we are "bringing together notions that are apparently foreign to each other, and separating notions that are so close that their 'relationship' seems merely metaphorical" (Colombat 1991: 13).

[29] The concepts have, through and for us, informed one another. Indeed, the conceptual rhizome does not map on to a botanical definition. Nonetheless, the biological referent does serve a useful purpose in suggesting why Deleuze and Guattari chose to employ the term, and what they sought to do with it. They make the rhizome oppose the root, and if we draw from the physical rhizome, there is an obvious literal contrast between the growth of a rhizomic root and a stem. As Colombat (1991:15), in a discussion of the trajectories of Deleuze's work, comments:

*A botanical rhizome proliferates and runs along the surface of the ground. It is defined as an underground stem of perennial plants, as opposed to the root, which is an axial part of vascular plants. It is the very proliferation of its outgrowth that allows the rhizome to create new shapes of life.*

As BLAD has proliferated, from root to blog, Facebook to FTR, it has created these new shapes in our minds, thus affecting how we approach our fieldwork, giving us a new concept, lively in its metamorphosis, with which to work. Similarly, as use of the rhizome as an idea has spread, proliferated, it has fulfilled Deleuze's comment (Liberation, October 23, 1980 cited in Colombat 1991:11) that the concept itself is an open system. Constantly generative, the rhizome '*gains ground while varying, branching off, metamorphosing itself*' (Liberation, September 22, 1988 cited in Colombat 1991: 16).

[30] Just as there is no concrete division between theory and method in anthropology, neither does there exist separation between the rhizomes that appear in this paper. Indeed, it would not do to attempt to work with a static representation of a rhizome, for as Colombat (1991:16) argues, '*it is inseparable from its many possible but concrete applications each of which will slightly modify its definition*'. We came to engage with the rhizome as a botanical root through rhizome as Deleuze-Guattarian concept, and inversely, the rhizome as a concept became informed by the rhizome as root. Each use of the concept metamorphoses the borrowed tool, keeping the system (definition of the rhizome) 'open': it cannot be pinned down. The theory and method were thus intertwined through this physical experiment of rhizome as lived experience, but the separate levels on which the rhizome is discussed in our presentation are forcibly extracted in order to make linear narrative. True to the conceptual rhizome, we cannot separate these different levels but have done so here for the purposes of clarity, and to expose the movement inherent in the application of this concept which makes metaphor to a metamorphosis.

[31] In the following discussion of how the project has helped us with our thinking of our anthropological work, we use the journey with BLAD and using lived experience as a way of constructing/generating knowledge as an analogy to how anthropology works best. In ethnography one can follow the actants (Latour 2005) by living closely with the subject of study and engaging with the everyday through participant observation and interviews. BLAD and learning about the abstract concept of the rhizome serves as an analogy here to the lived experience of ethnography in general. How BLAD and the concept of rhizome have helped us to understand the complexities of our fieldwork will be described next.

## Fieldwork

[32] The complexities in our fieldsite emerge from the fact that the assemblages that we are studying are collaborative as well as discursive. In our Sri Lankan based ethnographic fieldwork there are a number of (sub-) rhizomes magnified. Our arguments point to the potential for the use of rhizome in ethnographic fieldwork, which is a novel contribution anthropological methodology/theory.

[33] In our experience, the rhizome has operated as a way of making sense of the complexities and messiness of this kind of research. Additionally, it gives us a glimpse of how everything is connected 'in the process'. An intellectual precursor to the kind of ethnographic study we are embarking on was carried out by Liisa Malkki (1992) in her ethnography of refugees in transition and liminal spaces. Making great use of Deleuze and Guattari, Malkki makes a case for a history of nomadology, of movement: histories of displacement, history dispersed, and the history of cultural roots that change, reshape, restructure and grow as people move. However, although movement of people is intrinsic to this fieldwork, ours would not be a history of rootlessness as 'Diaspora' or 'refugees' as Malkki describes it, but as the chaos (see Mosko and Damon 2005) of the international collaboration. The subjects of our research, those scientists that are involved in the research projects that we study, travel globally to attend conferences, higher education and capacity building workshops, etc. This flow or movement of people is one of the layers of rhizomatic flows that is embedded in our fieldwork by implying that people who form the 'site' we study cannot be territorialized to singular locales.

[34] The concept of rhizome has given us a theoretical space to work in, a tool to reflect upon the assemblages of our fieldwork when few conceptual tools existed. To us, these assemblages consist of the messy encounter of discursive, international and national forces where there is no centre to control the process of how ideas, practices and policies are adopted in any given context. These processes are rhizomatic in their ubiquitous, centre-less way; they materialize independent of each other in a number of locales, exist simultaneously in various fields. If we see the rhizome as a tool to understand slices of an 'ethnographic cake', we surrender to the fact that a rhizomatic fieldsite is temporal and constantly shifting, changing and alive. A slice today is different from that in a day's time, or a year. This interpretation allows us to see how the actors in the field have agency; they create events, affect trajectories. This is particularly important when challenging existing dichotomies or hierarchies. The concept of the rhizome has acted as a tool to understand the various complexities in our fieldwork that are material as well as discursive. Writing about these qualities is problematic, however, because they have the danger of slipping into seemingly static representations. The connections and qualities that we describe are fluid, changing, in process, and fluctuating, ubiquitous, connected and networked. To describe them as static would be not only arborescent, but would do violence to their nature as phenomena.

[35] For example, as part of the broader project, Salla is studying clinical trials on humans in rural hospitals in Sri Lanka and the research groups that conduct them. In the project we are not just interested in how the clinical trials materialize but take pains to attempt to consider 360 degrees of collaboration in these projects. The challenge of a '360 degree view' is one of keeping several perspectives in mind, in view, at any one time. It is a challenge pertaining as much to the practice and planning of research as to writing about these phenomena. It is necessary to consider international collaboration and bioethics from several perspectives. The most classically anthropological perspective—a situated, local approach, is in this work being combined with perspectives on international flows. As such, Salla works to see not just what happens in a rural hospital but how international partners who outsource trials work to influence, understand and govern trials. Thus the trials under study do not simply take place in hospitals but have a presence in multiple locales: a research centre that conducts clinical trials in Sri Lanka has funding collaborators in US and Australia, a sampling lab in Germany, an Indian drug provider. Furthermore while we do research on these, we are also collaborators: Salla is a supervisor of a PhD student in this research center, who studies the problems of clinical trials in a developing country context but who is also conducting a trial, and thus Salla's research subject. What we are observing in these international collaborations is that there is not one particular locale that would constitute the site of the clinical trials. Collaborations have multiple exit points—they materialize in different venues, and are still connected, but can survive independent of each other in a rhizomatic fashion. Still, on each level there exists various degrees and forms of power and hierarchy, and thus arborescence, that need to be taken into account.



[36] Rachel's work on the building of 'ethical capacity' in Sri Lanka illustrates a third complexity of the 'field'. The field comprises not only of individuals but traveling of ideas and practices: the discourse of bioethics. Bioethics is not material; it is a discourse that may at times lead to action or gather people together to discuss it (e.g. in ethics boards or capacity building workshops), but it is predominantly abstract and discursive, and based in agreements as declarations such as Universal Declaration of Bioethics and Human Rights (2005) or Declaration of Helsinki (2008). These are 'universal' by agreement, but their universality does not reach a form global jurisdiction, and the processes by which the realms of law, capacity and bioethics interact form cornerstones of Rachel's work. In a rhizomatic fashion, bioethics discourses and practices materialise independent of each other in a number of locales, and exist simultaneously in policy documents and as practices in the field.

[37] We are part of the international collaborative relationships that we study, so if we describe them as rhizomatic, we come to ask questions about how one can experience being part of a rhizome and more importantly how to represent that data without doing violence to the complexity of the fieldwork experience: writing a paper can be seen as obeisance to arborescent principles. We produce written ethnographies of these assemblages, texts in which we hope to be able to describe our fieldwork as a process, a becoming, in the written form. While we engage with and reconstruct these interconnected and moving fields by being in them we construct them by living in them and writing about them. In writing we will endeavor to avoid forcing static definitions on ethnographic connections, practices, discourses and ideas that by nature fluctuate. The process of producing this paper has included its own flows from the various contexts in which we have discussed BLAD and contains contributions by a number of people. As such, the paper is a contribution to the writings of the rhizome as a concept, thus adding to the open system of the concept in the analytical realm.

[38] These examples show the rhizome is not just conceptually challenging our thinking but through the challenges it makes, affects how we see, conduct and research. Through it, we have learned to think and see connection and flow in a way that moves us forward in a novel way. Studying different possible rhizomatic forms proposes a type of fieldwork we call multi-semantic or multi-referential.

### **Multi-semantic/multi-referential fieldwork**

[39] The influence of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome is evident in some of the existing anthropological globalisation literature (such as Appadurai 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Malkki 1992). The concept of the rhizome would seem to lend itself to a particular type of *ethnography*, as we have started to outline above, but apart from Malkki (1992), we have not encountered ethnographies that make use of Deleuze and Guattari in this way. The type of fieldwork in which we are engaged is multi-sited, multi-semantic and multi-referential. It makes demands beyond 'multi-sitedness' (Marcus 1995) as it is itself in flux, in formation through the movement it undertakes (changing shape and character in emails, being taken from place to place in documents, organizational practices and travelling of charismatic people), congealing in unpredictable ways, in unpredictable places.

[40] In the course of coming to understand the rhizome in its Deleuze-Guattarian incarnation, we recognized that strong boundaries, physical, temporal and conceptual, still form the way we thought about fieldwork. While *Global Assemblages* (Ong and Collier 2005) gets part of the way there by recognizing and describing global fluidities, much remains to be done. Therefore, we are reluctant to call our fieldwork simply multi-sited, and move towards considering it multi-semantic or multi-referential, terms that more easily allow for traveling concepts, ideas and lack of a specific 'site'. Anthropologists have not yet made the journey Kearney describes from '*two dimensional space with its centers and peripheries and sharp boundaries to a multidimensional [global] space with unbounded, often discontinuous and interpenetrating subspaces*' (2004: 219), because, we argue, we do not yet have the approaches to recognize them, nor the concepts to describe them. This is due in part to the quest for analytical clarity. What do we do with phenomena that are not bound to either a space or form, which are neither 'local' nor 'global' (nor indeed, glocal, a neologism coined for that which was considered to be analytically a mix of the two)?

[41] With focus turned away from geography or location through thinking with the rhizome, we are free to focus on the nature of these rhizomatic *relations*, relations that form core questions in these new forms of anthropological enquiry. Being set free to investigate perhaps novel connections does not negate the fact that we as anthropologists are still interested in what people themselves say about their experiences, and the depth of

knowledge that comes through conducting participant observation. We do not wish to suggest that by focusing on connectivity, we have lost sight of the ways in which *disconnections* equally act in the world with profound effects. Wary of the potential for this current of connectivity in thought to overwhelm, we bear in mind the points made by anthropologist Marilyn Strathern regarding a similarly connection-focused analytical framework, actor network theory. In Strathern's response, she considered some of the *'uses to which the concepts of 'hybrids' and 'networks' were being put, and reflected on 'the power of analytical narratives to extend endlessly'* (1996: 1). Strathern's reminder to actor network theorists of the power of comparative anthropological inquiry serves equal relevance here, as she suggests we examine how terms we use are *'put to work in their indigenous context, as well as how they might work in an exogenous one'* (1996: 521). As a concept, the rhizome allows a different kind of analytical purchase on the work we do. As a thought process, it allows the researcher to be open to seeing (dis)connections, not prescribing them before they are researched or 'closing them down' in the written document.

## Concluding Remarks

[42] As suggested at the outset, the conceptual, theoretical, practical and ethnographic gaps and bridges are always on the move; they shift with perspective and new data. In this paper we have outlined the ways in which the embodied thought-experiment with BLAD has impacted our work, and we now summarise some of the consequences and advances we believe we have made by thinking rhizomatically with rhizomes. Without an attempt at shaking up internal thought, the 'use' of the rhizome in our own work, or rather, thinking our own work through the rhizome, would not be possible.

[43] We suggested at the outset that the process to think with/through BLAD and the rhizome was as much creative as it was destructive. This paper has focused heavily on the creative potential of the rhizome as a concept in our work, and in our lives—to enrich and challenge our thoughts. It is here, in the challenge, lies its potential for subversion. It is those arborescent habits, which we all have, that have felt the nudge to break from their moulds. It is the abstract goal of Free The Rhizome to topple the arborescent order, provide an alternative to prior arborescent templates of thought. In this sense, the rhizome has behaved and been employed as a tool of perspective. To push the concept is to take the idea a step further and incorporate it in research and analysis. Methodologically, this is an important point regarding not prescribing the connections one is looking for, and in a field as filled with potential, unexpected linkages as these networks we tap into so to gather data, it is a position we fail to adopt at our own loss.

[44] International bioethics collaborations are an ideal place to attempt this, for there are multitudinous connections present in the project. There is no one locale; these associations are taking place in parallel processes shifting the landscape of these socio-scapes (Appadurai 1996) and in this sense, our research is taking place everywhere: it has no (one bounded) 'field'. These collaborations could be described as having multiple exit points, they materialize in different venues through different wormholes, and such shapes can usefully be thought through rhizomes. If arborescent thought is an attempt to seek linearity and lineages, rhizomatic thought is an attempt to act free from such structures, dispersed, and as such is willing to see connections where a traditional analysis might not look. Moreover, it encourages exploration of social phenomena as objects of study which would have not been possible by using 'classical' anthropological methodological and conceptual tools.

[45] This paper has been a journey to describe the personal integration of the rhizome as a tool into our everyday lives as well as anthropological analyses. We did with the rhizome what Deleuze and Guattari suggested should be done with it: we opened up spaces for ourselves, created new concepts. Our challenge to conventionality in theory and in practice was trying to learn to know and understand Deleuze and Guattari in a novel way. Rather than being classical bookworms, we studied the rhizome a Deleuze-Guattarian way: embarked on a journey of exploration. We created BLAD, went on a bu-ri-birth adventure, gave BLAD electronic presence, started a multi-national slogan campaign, took risks with our canons and went to tell the story to at the first International Deleuze Studies conference (Cardiff August 2008). The experience with BLAD has had multiple effects on our thinking and will keep informing our analysis in a way that is constantly in the process.

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## Notes

[1] As the opening of *A Thousand Plateaus* suggests, Deleuze and Guattari when writing the book 'were many' (1987: 3); so were we in writing this paper. We would particularly like to thank the following people for joining us on this journey with BLAD, aiding us in our thinking of the rhizome through various discussions and commenting on the paper: Hugo Reinert, Bob and Joanna Simpson, Christopher Kullenberg, Karl Palmås, Jakob Wenzer, Fredrick Svensk, and many other people at the First International Deleuze Conference in Cardiff 2008—you know who you are!

[2] All subheadings: Deleuze and Guattari, 2004 [1987] *A Thousand Plateaus* p. 27.